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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, MAY 30, 2008

In Today's Papers

Controversy Over 'CHP's Tapping' Grows

All news outlets report the ruling AKP has proposed creating a parliamentary commission to investigate the "wiretapping charges" put forth by the CHP. Opposition party CHP claimed someone, perhaps government security personnel, wiretapped their party headquarters and recorded a private conversation between CHP Secretary General Onder Sav and a former governor that was published recently almost verbatim in the Islamist Vakit daily. Interior Minister Besir Atalay, in response to comments by CHP Deputy Chairman Hakkı Suha Okay, said "prosecutors have launched an investigation into the allegations. I also propose to set up a multi-party parliamentary committee to inquire into the event." CHP demanded the resignation of Atalay over the bugging scandal. Atalay, however, rejected the call.

CHP leader Deniz Baykal said Turkey has been gradually transformed into a "police state," claiming the AKP has formed a secret "deep state network within the state apparatus." "The problem is not only the CHP's problem. The issue at stake is freedom of communication," Baykal said. Opposition MHP leader Devlet Bahceli said the AKP was creating a "dictatorship of fear." "The government has lost its political legitimacy, and it resorts to illegitimate and immoral methods to preserve its power," Bahceli noted.

Vakit now agrees with a story circulated yesterday by Islamist daily, Yeni Safak, which said Sav by mistake left his mobile phone on after talking to a Vakit reporter, who was then able to hear the other conversation. Mainstream Milliyet reports several university rectors and opposition MHP and the pro-Kurdish DTP lawmakers expressed concern over the matter, and they suspect their phones are tapped as well.

Editorial Commentary on Turkey's Watergate: Who Bugged the Opposition?

"Are We Being Tapped?"

Fehmi Koru wrote in Islamist-leaning Yeni Safak (5/30): "Following the CHP phone-tapping incident, everybody in Turkey recalled similar

stories from the past. In other words, nobody was surprised by this incident because the sophistication of today's high-tech devices makes the bugging business very easy. In the old days, phone tapping required a significant budget allocation for any government.

However, tapping devices are now attainable on the internet with the click of a mouse. Bugging the opposition party isn't necessarily only possible by a government because anybody can do it with today's technology. The transcript of the CHP member's conversation was printed in a political Islamist newspaper which raises some questions. Maybe all of this was planned to confuse minds and create suspicions against the AKP government. The AKP government should do everything necessary to uncover the truth about this incident. This is the best way to address the accusations. Otherwise the party may face political conspiracies."

"Turkey should not Live with Such Shame"

Mustafa Unal wrote in Islamist-leaning Zaman (5/30): "On this bugging issue, not only the opposition CHP, but everybody is reacting against it. Nobody wants this issue to be forgotten. Ankara has been living with paranoia for a long time because at least 10 bugged or tapped files have been circulated on the internet in the last year. The CHP's accusations are very serious and we have to remember that tapping conversations is a violation of constitution. The Interior Minister has made a very good proposal by suggesting a joint parliamentary commission to investigate the incident. The CHP's desire to put forward a censure motion in parliament against the ruling AKP for the incident only politicizes the issue more. The paper that printed the conversation is now giving a laughable explanation. It now claims the conversation was recorded through a cell phone that the CHP's Onder Sav had

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forgotten to turn off while having the subject conversation on another phone. Well, this is easy to confirm from phone company records. Whatever it is, the issue calls for immediate action, and whoever is responsible should be punished."

Congressman Tanner in Ankara

Milliyet, Star: Mainstream Milliyet reports that PM Erdogan met with a US Congressional delegation yesterday at the AKP headquarters. The delegation was led by US House of Representatives NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATOPA) Group Chairman, Representative John Tanner. Milliyet quotes Tanner regarding the AKP closure case as saying "the institutions of democracy should be respected. We want the institutions of democracy to continue to function in Turkey. We respect Turkey as a democracy in this region of the world." When he was asked whether the US considers the AKP as a threat to secularism, Tanner said "Democracy is very important in this part of the world. And democracy in Turkey is important for the US." Conservative Star reports that Tanner's counterpart in the Turkish Parliament, Vahit Erdem, hosted a lunch in the parliament in honor of the delegation. During the lunch, Tanner said "We want our Turkish friends to know that we are determined to continue our support to Turkey in its fight against PKK terrorism. Democracy has no bigger enemy than terrorism."

FM Babacan Draws Reaction

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Vatan, Aksam: Foreign Minister Babacan's remarks during his speech at the European Parliament, suggesting that not only non-Muslim minorities but also Muslims in Turkey have problems with religious freedoms, drew wide reaction from the opposition parties and from his own AK Party. Accusing Babacan of not knowing a statesman's code of conduct, deputies from the AKP and the opposition parties said that Turkey is the only country in the Muslim world where religious beliefs could be practiced in a most extensive and perfect sense. Milliyet reports that CHP and DSP deputies have already submitted several question motions to parliament about Babacan's remarks.

McClellan Hits Bush over Iraq

All news outlets continue to report on former White House Secretary Scott McClellan's charges in his explosive new book, focusing on the public and Administration responses. Mainstream Sabah titles "Anti-Bush Book is Number One," noting "McClellan's book, which criticizes the Bush administration, is ranked number one at Amazon." The paper also adds Secretary Rice's response to questions about the

book, "we tried to do our best in Iraq." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes in "White House Puzzled: This is Not the Scott We Knew," that the White House accused McClellan of "dissatisfaction and revenge for positions he couldn't acquire." Leftist Taraf carries the headline "Knocking Down Saddam Was the Best Thing to Do."

State-Run TRT to Kick Off Kurdish Broadcasts

All papers report the Turkish Parliament approved Thursday a proposal for starting broadcasts "in languages other than Turkish" including Kurdish, Arabic and Persian, on state-run TRT television. The proposal was supported by the AKP and the DTP. Opposition far right MHP lawmaker Oktay Vural said Kurdish language broadcasting was violation of the constitution's provision that Turkish is the official language of the country. "They want to found a new television similar to the Roj TV," said Oktay.

Court Bans Istanbul's Sole Gay Rights Association

Liberal Radikal and nationalist-oriented Cumhuriyet report a court closed Istanbul's sole gay rights association, LambdaIstanbul, on Thursday after the prosecutor said it broke "public morality laws." The prosecutor argued LambdaIstanbul aims broke the law concerning the protection of family and public morality, and a court ruled in favor of closing the association. LambdaIstanbul, set up in 1993, is the first gay rights association closed by a European Union candidate nation, says Radikal. A gay rights activist in

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LambdaIstanbul said, "We are in a country where a closure case has been opened against the ruling party. The political atmosphere is anti-democratic and it lacks tolerance." The association will appeal against the court decision, and, if necessary, will go to the European Court of Human Rights, according to papers.

Headscarved Women Protest Male Passengers Seated Next to Them in THY Flight

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports 18 women passengers on their way back to Turkey from the Hajj in Saudi Arabia, walked out of a Turkish Airlines (THY) plane in Istanbul Airport in protest because male passengers were seated next to them. THY officials in Istanbul sent the women to Ankara on another plane, making sure no males were seated next to them. Aviation experts told Cumhuriyet allowing passengers to leave the plane with excuses other than health reasons is a "breach of security" since the passengers could have left a bomb inside the plane.

Turkish Jets Bomb 16 Targets in Northern Iraq

Sabah, Milliyet, Hurriyet, Turkiye, Vatan and others: The Turkish General Staff (TGS) announced on their website yesterday that Turkish Air Force jets hit and demolished 16 targets in the Hakurk region of Northern Iraq. Meanwhile, Sabah reports that military operations continue in Cudi, Gabar and Bestler-Dereeler regions in the east of Turkey. Sabah also reports that six people were detained in Izmir while they were preparing plans to attack police stations and military units. Reportedly, they confessed they had had bomb training in the PKK camps in Northern Iraq.

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- PM Erdogan and his ruling AKP lawmakers are to go into their "Kizilcahamam" camp near Ankara for three days to discuss a "roadmap" regarding the closure case against their party.
- The Turkish General Staff (TGS) is to hold a symposium on the future of the Middle East on June 5-6 in Ankara.
- Iran resumes supply of natural gas for Turkey. An explosion, suspected by some Turks as sabotage, had disrupted the pipeline May 126.

International News

- At a UN gathering in Sweden on Iraq, PM Nuri al-Maliki called on

neighboring countries to write off Iraq's debts and waive compensation payments for wars fought under Saddam Hussein.

- Austria has taken over from Turkey the command of KFOR (Kosovo Force).

- France is projected to have a population of more than 70 million by 2050, with nearly one person out of three being over 60 years.

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